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Sandy Pepin, Head Nurse, Solnit South
Department of Children and Families
SEIU District 1199 New England
Before the Appropriations Committee

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Committee. My name is Sandy Pepin and I am a Head Nurse at Solnit South Children's Psychiatric Center. I am here today to talk to you about the expansion of DCF services, including the re-opening of all of Solnit South's units.

Currently, we are operating at less than half our capacity because the state hasn't filled empty positions. In DCF alone, we have at least 100 vacancies and are preparing for at least another 100 from retirements. All of these vacancies equal fewer services at a time when DCF services are desperately needed for children and families who are some of the most vulnerable residents of Connecticut. The expansion of services at DCF is especially essential to youth and families of color who are facing increased stress from social isolation, learning poverty, and racism, which further threatens their learning and experience of safety.

At DCF Solnit South, we have the capacity to care for more than 80 children, but due to hiring neglect by the current administration, we can only operate at less than half of the current capacity that we actually have, which only means that kids who absolutely need the help, are unable to get it. I know we've all seen the reports of children languishing in emergency rooms. The solution to this is to increase our staffing levels by hiring and filling positions. If we increase staffing levels, we CAN offer services that these children need to MORE children and families. The state infrastructure is already there. We simply need staff to be able to expand.

DCF healthcare workers know what kids and our communities need – we need early interventions, training, mental health care, in schools and in communities. This all takes commitment to these children and their families. Making that commitment is easy. All you have to do is fund these positions and services. Thank you for your time.